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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5322

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RHMFIASS/39ABG CP INCIRLIK AB TU IMMEDIATE

RHMFIASS/425ABG IZMIR TU//CC// IMMEDIATE

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RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// IMMEDIATE

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA//

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000340

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2028

TAGS: PREL MOPS MARR PTER TU IZ

SUBJECT: TURKEY/IRAQ SITREP 2: GROUND OPERATION CONTINUES, LOCAL REACTIONS

REF: ANKARA 0331

Classified By: A/DCM Kim DeBlauw for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Turkish ground operations inside of northern Iraq continue. According to press reporting, the Turkish ground units involved are two brigades from the Second Army based in Malatya. U.S. military logistics personnel at the Habur Gate crossing between Turkey and Iraq reported traffic flowing normally on February 22, despite some press reports that the crossing is severely restricted or even closed to civilian traffic.

¶2. (U) NTV reports that the Presidency issued a statement saying that President Gul talked to Iraqi President Talabani by phone. Gul gave Talabani information about the operation against the PKK, briefed him about the NSC decisions and invited him to Turkey. Talabani reportedly has accepted the invitation. PM Erdogan is quoted widely as stating that the PKK is the only target of the operation. Parliament Speaker Toptan, referring to the operation, stated that the Turkish Armed Forces have always fulfilled their duties successfully and they will continue to do so. NTV claims that 10,000 troops are involved and that the operation had penetrated the Hakurk region to a depth of ten kilometers into Iraqi territory. It reports the TGS as stating, "as soon as we have attained our goals, we will pull out in the shortest time possible."

¶3. (U) With respect to claims that Habur Gate has been closed to truck traffic, State Minister Yazici responded that it is not closed; priority is being given to military vehicles. U.S. military personnel at Habur report normal traffic flows on February 22. A number of channels are reporting that a US State Department official said, "This is not good news; it has reached a new stage." They also report that a US Army spokesperson said the U.S. supports Turkey's right to defend itself.

¶4. (U) Turkish press reports that Kurdish Regional Government president Masoud Barzani is on his way to the border area and quotes KDP official Safeen Dizayee as stating that Kurdish peshmerga have been ordered not to interfere with Turkish troops.

¶5. (C) Yilmaz Akinci, a journalist from Diyarbakir, told Consulate Adana that the situation is calm in that largely

Kurdish city in southeastern Turkey. He speculated that the Turkish operation has taken PKK sympathizers in the region by surprise and surmised that the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) is waiting to see the extent and duration of the cross border operation before deciding on its response. Serdar Sengul, an aide to the Kurdish mayor of Diyarbakir, told Consulate Adana that Kurds in the region are concerned that the offensive signals a shift in Turkish, and U.S., policy towards the Kurdish issue, treating it as an exclusively military problem. He said Kurds are skeptical that the target is only the PKK and not the Kurdistan Regional Government. Mehmet Celal Baykara, president of a Kurdish cultural group in Istanbul, told ConGen Istanbul that Kurds do not look warmly at the military operation and suspect it is aimed at Masoud Barzani and not just PKK terrorists.

¶6. (U) Opposition reactions have been predictable.
Republican People's Party (CHP) head Deniz Baykal characterized the operation as a new, positive stage which should continue until it has achieved its goals. The leader of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), Devlet Bahceli, has welcomed the operation and stated that, instead of being temporary, it should lead to a permanent security zone in Iraq.

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